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ABSTRACT

Many minority students remain segregated from the mainstream of society. Disproportionate numbers of minority students drop out or require special education, and they are more likely to encounter teachers unqualified to meet their special needs. If more emphasis were placed on the liberal arts, teachers would be better able to accommodate ethnic and cultural differences in their classrooms, and better able to help mainstream the minority students into society. Liberally educated persons are more likely to know why they should be tolerant of others' feelings and ideas, and to be more appreciative of social diversity. Furthermore, liberal arts education appears to be an educational affirmation of the social bond that joins all people. The ultimate value of liberal arts education is that it makes us discontented with imperfection and it inspires us to develop our potentialities as unique individuals. (KH)

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Liberal Education and Mainstreaming

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ABSTRACT

Many minority students are still segregated from the mainstream of the society. By placing more emphasis on the liberal arts education, teachers should be able to accommodate the ethnic and cultural differences in their classrooms to help mainstreaming the minority students into the society. The contention is that liberally educated persons are more likely to promote social integration and to combat social disintegration.

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Liberal Education and Mainstreaming

In general, cultures do change over time. Of the many concepts which deal with many types of change, the process of acculturation and assimilation are the most central. However, cultural assimilation fails to recognize the intrinsic worth of diverse cultures. It is argued that the coexistence of multiple cultural traditions within a single society provides a variety of alternatives which should enrich life. The Commission on Multicultural Education of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education[1] writes that cultural pluralism is "more than a temporary accommodation to placate racial and ethnic minorities." The Commission adds that it is a "concept that aims toward a hightened sense of being and of wholeness of the entire society based on the unique strengths of each of its parts."

Students and teachers alike bring to the school setting a variety of cultural values and experiences. Minorities may bring their values and experiences different from many of their majority peers and teachers. Schooling is a formal setting. Culture is primarily transmitted through modeling behavior in an informal setting. However, teachers transmit their cultures to students of various cultures in both formal and informal ways in the formal setting of the school.[2] This means that the manner in which teachers address different values and experiences to different ethnic

and cultural differences may affect the perception and attitude of the minority students toward their schooling.

Among high school students, 35 percent of Hispanics aged 18 to 21 drop out prior to graduation, compared to 25.5 percent of blacks and 15.5 percent of whites.[3] Blacks constitute 38 percent of the educable mentally retarded students, which is over twice the percentage found in the general population (16 percent). While the Office of Civil Rights[4] indicates that 25 percent of the special education students come from minority backgrounds, only 11 percent teachers are from minority groups.[5] These figures indicate that there are many handicapped and non-handicapped minority students who need services not usually required by average students. Especially handicapped students from minority groups whose educational problems are compounded by failure of the curriculum and methodology to adapt to language and cultural factors that impinge on the educational process.[6] It is also indicated that lack of teacher counseling and low expectations from the teacher are the two major contributing factors to the failure of the minority students.

Another problem is that many minority students are still segregated from the mainstream of the society. Futrell says that in their zeal to alleviate teacher shortages in the nation's schools, some districts may disproportionally place uncertified

teachers in predominantly minority schools.[7] One problem with segregation is that it perpetuates segregation. For example, graduates of segregated elementary and secondary schools tend to attend segregated colleges.[8]

It is suggested that teachers with strong liberal arts education background might help both handicapped and non-handicapped minority students better than those who have little liberal arts background. The contention is that liberally educated persons are more likely to know why they should be tolerant of others' feelings, ideas, and social diversity.[9] Furthermore, liberal arts education appears to be an educational affirmation of the social bond that joins all people. The purposes of general and liberal education can be divided into two groups: those that promote social integration and those that combat social disintegration, according to Boyce and Levine. They argue that general and liberal arts education should concentrate on those experiences that knit isolated individuals into a community.[10] The ultimate value of liberal arts education is that it makes us discontended with imperfection and it inspires us to develop the potentiality of the unique individuals as a "whole person."[11]

The current stress on the general and liberal education curriculum ought to include various kinds of learning situations, normally thought to be non-traditional, such as experiential

learning, and residential experiences. Furthermore, general and liberal education courses must be spreaded out over the entire undergraduate years rather than concentrated during the freshman year. Liberal arts background must be emphasized in teacher education, particulary.

Better education and mainstreaming of the minority students will not be a product merely of federal and state laws and assistance. Rather it depends upon the commitment of individuals of this society ready to show a caring attitude toward these students. The real human contact among people through shared values, shared responsibilities, and shared vision will transforms the mechanical act of communication into a shared intimacy which in turn will put them into the sphere of shared existence.

Notes

1. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Commission on Multicultural Education, "No One Model American," Journal of Teacher Education, 4(1973), 264.
2. M.J. Justiz and D.W. Darling, "A Multicultural Perspective in Teacher Education," Educational Horizons, 58(1980), 203-205.
3. "Hispanic Children Less Educated," Report on Education of the Disadvantaged, September 13, 1985, p.5.
4. Killalea Associates, State, Regional, and National Summaries of Date from the 1978 Civil Rights Survey of Elementary and Secondary, Prepared for the U.S. Office of Civil Rights, Alexandria, Virginia.
5. H.P. Baptisete, M.L. Baptiste, and D.M. Gollnick, Multicultural Teacher Education: Preparing Educators to Provide Educational Equity (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1980).
6. P. Norris and D.B. Overbeck, "The Institutionalized Mentally Retarded Navajo: A Service Program," Mental Retardation, 12 (1974), 18-20.
7. "Most Uncertified Teacher Put to Work in Minority Schools, Futrell Says," Report on Education of the Disadvantaged, September 13, 1985, p.13.